

TRENDS IN ROMANIAN TOURISM

Pîrjol Florentina

University of West Timișoara, Faculty of Economics And Business Administration

Maxim Raluca Georgiana

University of West Timișoara, Faculty of Economics And Business Administration

Nagy Andrea

University of West Timișoara, Faculty of Economics And Business Administration

Tourism is an industry of the future, having the potential to provide significant revenues, and an industry of „beauty”, because it will protect, preserve and contribute to arranging the environment affected by other human activities. This is why it is very important to know the evolution of this underdeveloped field in our country. This paper is intended as a study on current trends in Romanian tourism without any claim of being an exhaustive research on the industry, describing the main indices of tourist traffic and their influence on Romanian tourism. Nowadays, we witness three main trends in Romanian tourism: sustainability, ecotourism and the increasing presence of cultural tourism. Ecotourism, as a form of tourism, has emerged from people's need to withdraw in nature, to visit and learn about the natural areas which have or have not a national or international protection status. Cultural tourism appears as a type of tourism clearly differentiated from other forms or types of tourism, particularly through motivation. It can be defined as a form of tourist mobility whose primary goal is broadening the horizon of knowledge by uncovering its architectural and artistic heritage and the areas in which it originates. Sustainability for tourism, as for other industries, has three independent aspects: economic, socio-cultural and environmental. Sustainability implies permanence, which means that sustainable tourism requires the optimal use of resources, minimizing the negative economic, socio-cultural and ecological impact, maximizing the benefits upon local communities, national economies and conservation of nature. Regarding statistical data, in what quantity is concerned, there is an increase in Romanian tourism, but in what quality is concerned there is a setback for tourism in the last years. This aspect should make public authorities take concern in improving the infrastructure and the quality of the touristical activity and in diversifying entertainment.

Keywords: sustainability, cultural tourism, ecotourism, trends, tourist traffic.

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As the human society has developed, tourism as an industry grew on a very large scale, influencing today the contemporary world both on a geographical as well as on a socio-cultural and economic level.

Tourism as a social-economic activity that has gained a rightful place in all human activities, feels at the utmost the economic imbalances and social convulsions. Not incidentally, today, the largest tourism and tourist-sender and tourist-receiver countries are the overdeveloped ones, while countries with actual developing potential in tourism, where the economy is in transition, face difficult challenges both in terms of their own tourism and international tourism.

Romania's tourism potential is extremely high, but unfortunately not properly capitalized. Unlike neighboring countries, Romania has a high tourism potential both in the mountain areas as well as in the coastal areas. Thus, the seaside tourist resorts include Mamaia, Eforie Nord, Eforie Sud, Costinesti, Jupiter, Saturn, Mangalia, Vama Veche, Venus, and in the mountainous areas - especially in the Meridional Carpathians, but not only, there are true touristical treasures.

Travel and Tourism in Romania had a different journey for the past 10 years, expressed in international arrivals. Beside a slight increase in 1999 – 4,5 million tourists - arrivals have had a

continuous decline until 2001 - 2002, when 1.5 million tourists arrived. This was also due to the global economic downturn after the events of September 2001, which negatively affected the entire world tourism. After this period there was an impressive growth in 2003, with more than 16%, reaching in 2004 6.7 million tourists, growth that was sustained also in 2005, the number of tourists increasing by 500 thousand over the previous year. The vast majority of international arrivals in Romania were from 2000, about 95% of visitors coming from the mainland. Of these, 75% - according to data from 2004 - are arrivals from five countries: Ukraine, Moldavia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006 the number of tourist arrivals was 6 million while in 2008 it rose to 8.8 million tourists.

This paper is intended as a study on current trends in Romanian tourism without any claim of being an exhaustive research on the industry. Tourism will become an industry of the future and will remain, certainly, an "industry of beauty" because it will protect, preserve and, at the same time, contribute to arranging the environment, affected by other human activities.

Sustainability, for tourism as well as for other industries, has 3 independent aspects: economic, socio-cultural and environmental. Sustainable development implies permanency, which means that sustainable tourism refers to the optimal use of resources (including biological diversity), minimization of the negative economic, socio-cultural and environmental impact, maximizing the benefits upon local communities, national economies and environment conservation. As a natural consequence, sustainability refers also to the necessary managerial structures for fulfilling these objectives. The purpose of sustainable tourism has to be subordinated to the national and regional economic and social development plans. The actions may cover economic purposes (increase of income, diversifying and integration of the activities, development control, enhancement and zoning), social purposes (decreasing the poverty level and the inequity of income distribution, the protection of the original socio-cultural heritage, the participation and implication of local communities), or ecological purposes (the protection of the functions of ecotourism, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity). Some specialists prefer to talk about the sustainable development of tourism, sooner than about a sustainable tourism, the first concept referring to all the aspects of development, while the other concept refers to some aspects and parts of tourism – such as long-distance air transportation that can simply not be sustainable, in what current technologies are concerned, even with the use of the best methods.

Touristic politic and plan implementation represents a big responsibility of the government and of the private sector. The private sector answers for establishing a tactic, planning and researching, forming the basic infrastructure, developing some touristic attractions, establishing and administrating the norms of offering services and facilities, establishing the means of administration and valuing the territory and of protection of the environment, establishing the standards for preparing and perfecting the field of tourism, sustaining health and public security.

The private sector answers for the development of housing services and operations of touristic agencies, the activity of commercial organizations with touristic characteristics, and it is based on infrastructure, development of certain touristic attractions and their promotion through specific marketing activities. The political devotion for touristic development in a planned and sustainable way is essential. Also, the nongovernmental organizations are involved in more and more aspects connected to touristic development.

Sustainable tourism in 2010 will develop the idea of satisfying the needs of current tourists and of the current industry and, at the same time, protecting the environment and future opportunities. It is aimed to meet all the economic, social, aesthetic needs etc. of the „actors” of tourism, maintaining cultural, ecological integrity, biological diversity and all the systems that sustain life. At a macroeconomic level, the concept of sustainable tourism has not yet had a major impact. A set of recommendations have been made concerning the development of tourism in protected areas. The concept of sustainable tourism has now become much more popular at a microeconomic level through the alternative of green tourism.

Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is a type of tourism that is clearly differentiated from other forms or types of tourism, particularly through motivation. It can be defined as a form of tourist mobility and its primary purpose is broadening the horizon of knowledge through the discovery of the architectural and cultural-artistic heritage and of the areas where they originate. Cultural tourism is a form of exploitation of human resources and therefore it may include urban and rural-ethnographic tourism. Cultural tourism directs to the notion of heritage, which represents tangible and intangible components of any society's identity, developed, and then transmitted and updated in the territory. The tangible heritage includes museums, monuments, architectural ensembles, art cities, villages with well-preserved traditions, archaeological sites, gardens, religious or military buildings. The intangible heritage includes festivals and cultural events, traditions and creative skills accumulated over time.

Tourist flows are characterized in cultural tourism by setting up a clientele of its own which can be specialized in a particular topic (able to walk distances to capture yet another impressive aspect of their passion), or be attracted to all that is cultural, or incidental, which is usually majoritary and consists of those who, being on vacation for rest and recreation, are visiting and sightseeing in the areas where they are. Another feature of the flows involved in cultural tourism is the membership of the participants in socio-professional categories or having a high or mid-level education: pupils, students, intellectuals, and therefore its collective character is uncertain. Predominant in the composition of tourist flows is the urban population.

Effectiveness of cultural tourism is the lowest among all types of tourism, but its development also presents a number of advantages, which means that the demand is stable and ignores trends, as was the case with spa tourism. Expansion potential is enormous, especially in the context of globalization, when exotic sites such as The Easter Island are no longer so distant.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism, as a form of tourism, has emerged from people's need to withdraw in nature, to visit and learn about the natural areas which have or have not a national or international protection status. Ecotourism has been defined as: "Ecotourism means the trip taken in most cases in developing countries to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, leisure or voluntary assistance (voluntary) which considers the flora, fauna, geology and ecosystems of an area itself, as well as the people living in the surrounding area, their needs, their culture and their relationship with the earth" (Swanson).

With the worldwide development of ecotourism came the recognition of the benefits of this type of tourism as an optimal exploitation "mechanism" of touristic and landscape resources. These characteristics of ecotourism were the reason why the United Nations declared 2002 the "International Year of Ecotourism". The attention that this form of tourism has from the United Nations is based on the recognition of the potential that ecotourism as a sustainable development tool has, a tool that can lead to achieving the three main objectives of the Rio Convention, namely: biological and ecological diversity conservation; promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism; fair distribution of benefits from ecotourism to local people and communities.

National governments should involve managers of protected areas and tourism industry in developing and implementing plans for sustainable tourism. These should be part of national sustainable development strategies and should be included in individual management plans of protected areas.

The measures for protected areas include: transforming current unsustainable development to more sustainable forms; setting sustainable standards for new developments, particularly in sensitive environments; designation of areas for different degrees of travel based on carrying capacity of protected areas, including sanctuaries and quiet areas, as areas suitable for different levels of tourist use and development; reducing pollution and decongestion of holiday traffic;

avoiding excessive tourism and recreation in protected areas; ensuring that tourism benefits local communities; providing support and resources through early implementation of plans; training managers of protected areas in sustainable tourism.

Pioneering schemes should be promoted in sustainable tourism, for example: loans, grants or tax concession for farmers and local communities to develop small businesses that use protected areas in an appropriate manner; administrative projects to show an innovative approach on tourism, appropriate for local economies; use of EU and national funds for tourism to encourage sustainable tourism in Romania.

Next we will present some statistics regarding Romanian tourism for 2008.

The category other cities has the main share with a number of 1531 uniti, while the seaside disputes places 2 and 3 with spa resorts. The number of units for the seaside in 2008 was 934, while for the spa resorts it was 382 units.

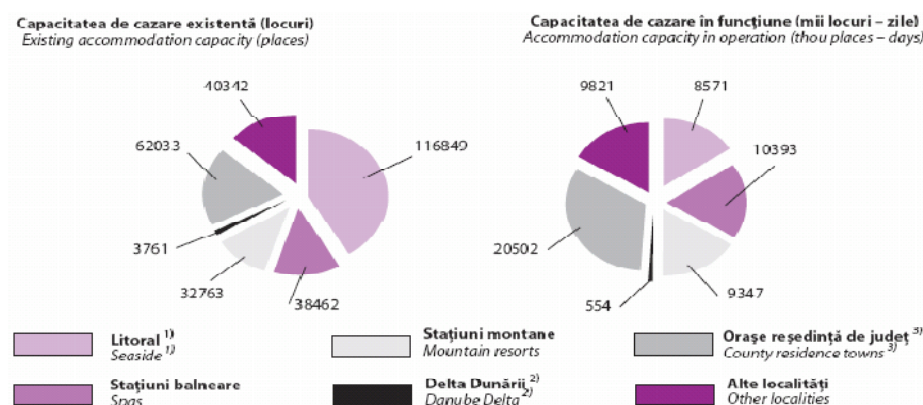


Fig.1: Existing accomm. capacity (places) and accomm. capacity in operation (thou places – days)

Source: Anuarul statistic al României, 2009

The Romanian seaside holds first place in terms of existing capacity, followed by the head towns of the counties and the spa resorts. Ranked lowest in this regard is the Danube Delta in terms of both existing capacity and operational capacity expressed in thousands of places-days (Fig. 1).

In the category of hotels, the highest rank is for the two-star and one-star hotels with an occupancy rate of 46.1% and 46.0%. The villas category is best represented by those not classified at a rate of 36.7%. Urban tourist pensions are best represented by five-star pensions, while the rural touristic pensions have a higher occupancy rate at five- and four-stars with an occupancy rate of 24.0% and 23.0% (Fig.2).

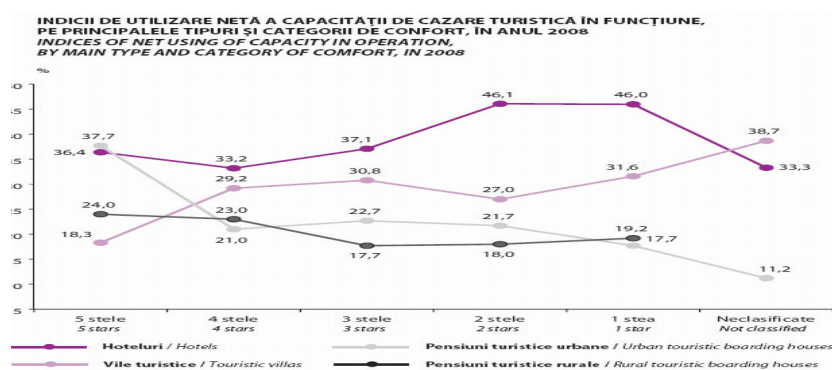


Fig.2: Indices of net using of capacity in operation, in 2008

Source: Anuarul statistic al României, 2009

The number of overnight stays has increased from 103,4% in 2006 to 112,1% in 2007 and to 112,8% in 2008 (Fig.3). This fact is mainly due to the increase of Romanian tourists' number of overnights from 105 % in 2006 to 114,1 % in 2007 and to 116,5 % in 2008. On the other hand, the foreign tourism, after an increase up to 103,5% in 2007, it decreased to 97,0% in 2008. 2005 is considered to be the 100% year.

Increasing internal tourism is due to the growth of the population's standard of living in 2008, the population assigning a rather high percentage of the family budget for consumption.

Alarming is the fact that the number of foreign tourists drops quite dramatically below the level of 2005 in 2008. As Romania is not labeled as a country with political instability, this decline may be due to the poor quality level of public service and to the rudimentary infrastructure.

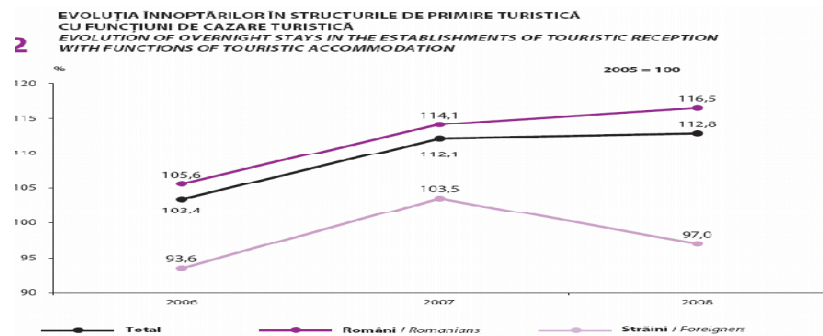


Fig.3: Evolution of overnight stays in the establishments of touristic reception with functions of touristic accommodation

Source: Anuarul statistic al României, 2009

In 2008, the number of overnights spent by category of comfort was the highest for the two-star category with 9.099 million overnights, followed by three-star hotels with 3.975 million overnight stays. What is striking is that the number of overnights in nonclassified accommodation structures is higher than the number of overnight stays in five-star categories. It seems that Romanians do not prefer high standards and settle for a lower level of travel services. Instead, foreigners are more demanding with confort in the establishments of touristic reception and this can be best seen in five-star categories (Fig. 4).

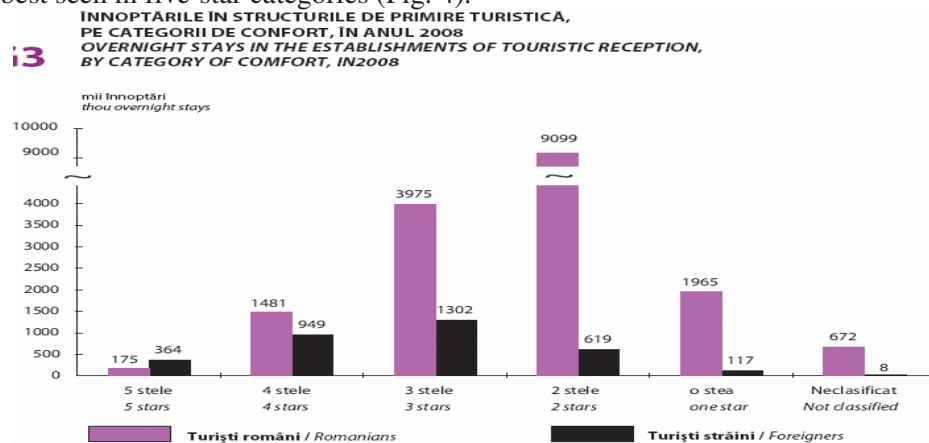


Fig.4: Overnight stays in the establishments of touristic reception by category of confort, in 2008

Source: Anuarul statistic al României, 2009

In terms of arrivals and departures of tourists at Romania's borders, there is an increasing trend of Romanian tourist departures abroad, meaning an increase from 6.5 million international travels in 2005 to 13,1 million international travels in 2008. This upward trend is true for foreign tourists arrivals as well, meaning an increase from 5.6 million international travels in 2005 to 8,8 million international travels in 2008. Unfortunately, as we have previously seen, foreign tourists do not stay a long period of time in Romania, fact demonstrated by the number of overnights spent by these foreign tourists.

In consequence, nowadays, we witness three main trends in Romanian tourism: sustainability, ecotourism and the increasing presence of cultural tourism.

Regarding statistical data, in what quantity is concerned, there is an increase in Romanian tourism, but in what quality is concerned (for example overnight stays) there is a setback for Romanian tourism in the last years. This aspect should make public authorities take concern in improving the infrastructure and the quality of the touristical activity and in diversifying entertainment.

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